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SUBJECT: Iraqi Kurdistan Region Media Summary --
February 8, 2007

1. (U) This is a Regional Reconstruction Team (RRT) cable.

Ansar al-Islam Plot to Murder Sulaimaniyah Security Officials
Thwarted

2. (U) Hawlati independent newspaper published details of a plot by three members of Ansar al-Islam to murder the Head of the Sulaimaniyah Asayish Political Department, Hassan Noori. (Note: Asayish are local security forces.) According to Hawlati, the plan included a suicide bomber and two marksmen in-case the suicide bomber was not effective. Noori told Hawlati in an interview "we had gained information about the plan from day one and we have been tracking it down. I think the only reason I was targeted by Ansar al-Islam is because I have been quite insistent on cracking their members down and stopping their terrorist activities within the Sulaimaniyah province." All three terrorists have been arrested by the Sulaimaniyah Asayish and a full investigation is being conducted.

No Kurdish Soldiers Have Been Killed in Baghdad

3. (U) In a statement to Hawlati newspaper, KRG-Sulaimaniyah Deputy Minister of Region for Peshmarga Affairs, Jabbar Yawar said that so far no one from the Sulaimaniyah Battalion of the Iraqi Army has been killed or injured in Baghdad. (Note: This contradicts reports in Awena newspaper last week that said 17 Kurdish soldiers who had been killed in the fighting in Baghdad were secretly returned to the Kurdistan Region.) Yawar said, "The recent reports on casualties among the Kurdish soldiers in Baghdad are fabricated and very far from the truth." He also mentioned that the Ministry has not received any reports of Kurdish soldiers deserting the Iraqi Army.

KRG PM Calls for Fight against Corruption, Protection for
Journalists, Children

4. (U) Newspapers today carried fuller coverage of KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani's statement at the merger of the Justice Ministries on February 6. Articles said Barzani asked the new KRG Minister of Justice, Mahmood Ito (PUK member) to do an immediate follow-up of all recently implemented legal projects. He also called for the new merged ministry to form follow-up committees for anti-corruption, for protection of freedom of the press and the rights of journalists, and for the protection of the rights of women and children.

Nishtiman "Homeland" Enterprise Zone Opens in Erbil

5. (U) Newspapers reported on the opening of part of the Nishtiman "Homeland" Enterprise Zone in Erbil today. The zone is located in the heart of Erbil, and the part to be opened today will include more than 500 office spaces for lawyers, merchants, doctors, and

contractors with all services and utilities. As soon as the whole market is complete, it will have annual estimated revenue of \$24 billion for the KRG.

NGO for Kurdish Political Prisoners Announced

¶16. (U) Kurdish media reported on the establishment of the United Political Prisoners of Kurdistan, an NGO to assist Kurdish political prisoners and refugees as they return to the Kurdistan Region. A ceremony was held in Erbil to mark the new NGO and was attended by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani (PUK member), KRG President Massoud Barzani (KDP member), KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani (KDP member) and representatives from various KRG ministries and offices. The new NGO will replace political prisoners organizations that had previously been run by the KDP and PUK. Mahmood Ito will head the new group.

Fuel Rations to Sulaimaniyah Government and Party Offices Cut

¶17. (U) Major newspapers reported that fuel rations for government and party offices in Sulaimaniyah will be temporarily cut by up to 90% to allow greater availability on the market for commercial and private purposes. Abdulla Ali, an official from the Fuel Projects Foundation said, "We have received 4,745,000 liters of kerosene, 724,816 liters of gasoline, and 660,590 liters of diesel from Kirkuk, Basra, Iran, Ibrahim Khalil, and Nokan Gas from January 29 through February 7." He also said that distributing fuel to government institutions and parties will now take place on a weekly basis.

Salahaddin University Will Not Recognize Koya University Post-Graduate Degrees

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¶18. (U) According to Aso and Hawlati newspapers, Salahaddin University in Erbil will not recognize Masters and PhD degrees earned from the University of Koya. (Note: The University of Koya is new PUK-run University in Erbil province along the border with Sulaimaniyah. Salahaddin University in Erbil city has close ties to the KDP.) A formal letter issued by Salahaddin University denies the existence of any problems with the Kurdistan Region universities, especially the University of Koya, but says based on a vote by the majority of the Salahaddin University Council, the university has decided to disregard post graduate degrees from the University of Koya, claiming that they do not meet the scientific and academic standards.

Commentaries:

¶19. (U) PUK-run Kurdistan Nwe newspaper ran an interview with, Muhammed Ihsan, KRG Minister for Extra-regional Affairs and KRG representative to the GOI Higher Committee for the Implementation of Article 140. Ihsan states that any "Arab of Aribization" family in Kirkuk that objects to returning home should lose the right to vote in any referendum on the status of Kirkuk. The article says that Ihsan's statement is supported by the fact that 7,400 Arab families have already registered for relocation and compensation.

¶10. (SBU) This media summary is completed by Press and Cultural Specialist Hama Othman.